

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM DISCUSSES ELECTIONS
AND HIS LEADERSHIP AT OCT 15 PRESS CONFERENCE

1. SUMMARY: AT PRESS CONFERENCE OCT 15 PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM SAID EARLY NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD DEPEND ON SENATE'S CONTINUING TO REJECT GOVERNMENT BILLS AND REJECTING BUDGET BILL. HE MODESTLY SAID, IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION, THAT HE HAS THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF TALENT IN LABOR PARTY IN PARLIAMENT. HE MADE CLEAR THAT LABOR WILL NOT BE PRESSING FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS BEFORE FULL PARLIAMENTARY TERM IS UP. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING, IN VIEW OF POOR POSITION LABOR APPEARS TO BE IN, AS REFLECTED IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS. END SUMMARY

2. IN PRESS CONFERENCE OCT 15, FIRST TO BE HELD SINCE HIS RECENT RETURN FROM U.S., PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM DISCUSSED ELECTIONS PROSPECT, HIS LEADERSHIP OF ALP, TOUCHING ALSO ON ITEMS OF LESSER INTEREST TO U.S.

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3. ON ELECTIONS, WHITLAM WAS ASKED TO COMMENT ON OP-

POSITION LEADER SNEDDEN'S STATEMENT TO LIBERAL PARTY CONFERENCE IN CANBERRA OCT 13 THAT DRIVING FORCE FOR NEW ELECTIONS WOULD BE ATTITUDE OF AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE. WHITLAM REPLIED THAT PEOPLE HAD ELECTED LABOR TO GOVERNMENT IN 1972 AND 1974, AND HE ATTACKED OPPOSITION FOR SEEKING TO FORCE ANOTHER ELECTION BEFORE END OF STATUTORY TERM OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN 1977. HE NOTED THAT OPPOSITION HAS POWER TO FORCE ELECTIONS BY REJECTING MAJOR ITEMS OF GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AND BY REJECTING BUDGET. HE NOTED THAT OPPOSITION HAS ALREADY REJECTED 10 GOVERNMENT BILLS (AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, NATIONAL INVESTMENT FUND, FOUR BILLS ON NATIONAL HEALTH SCHEME, TWO BILLS TO GIVE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF MINING ON CONTINENTAL SHELF, AND TWO BILLS AMENDING CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION COMMISSION LEGISLATION). HE ADDED, ".... IF SUPPLY (BUDGET BILL) IS AGAIN REFUSED BY THE SENATE, THEN I SHALL ADVISE THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL TO DISSOLVE BOTH HOUSES ON THE BASIS OF A SECOND REJECTION, IF THERE IS IN FACT A SECOND REJECTION OF ANY OF THESE 10 BILLS...." IN ANSWER TO ANOTHER QUESTION WHITLAM SAID, ".... WE WILL NOT BE WORKING FOR ANY ELECTION BEFORE THE THREE YEARS ARE UP."

4. ASKED IF HE REGARDED HIMSELF AS INDISPENSABLE TO ALP AND ONLY PERSON COMPETENT TO LEAD LABOR GOVERNMENT, WHITLAM REPLIED, "NO, I BELIEVE THERE IS A WEALTH OF TALENT IN THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT IN THIS PARLIAMENT. I BELIEVE THAT I HAVE THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF TALENT AT THE PRESENT TIME. BUT, QUITE APART FROM WHAT I MAY THINK ABOUT THIS, THIS IS UNQUESTIONABLY THE VIEW OF ALL MY COLLEAGUES. THIS IS NOT AN ISSUE ON WHICH I FEEL DISPOSED TO DIFFER FROM THEM." IN RELATED QUESTION ON HIS LEADERSHIP, WHITLAM REPLIED "I'M NOT OBSESSED WITH THE QUALITIES OF MY LEADERSHIP. I'VE BEEN LEADER OF A POLITICAL PARTY IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT LONGER THAN MOST PEOPLE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF LEADING ANY POLITICAL PARTY IN THIS PARLIAMENT. I'VE BEEN LEADER OF MY PARTY FOR NEARLY EIGHT YEARS, AND AT EVERY ELECTION WE HAVE IMPROVED OUR PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE...."

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5. OTHER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS COVERED DETAILS OF THE BUDGET AND OF TAXATION ALLOWANCES OF LESSER INTEREST TO U.S.

6. COMMENT: WHITLAM IS NOTHING IF NOT CONFIDENT. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS HAVE BEEN STEADILY ADVERSE TO LABOR GOVERNMENT SINCE JULY, AND PERIOD OF PREPARATION OF BUD-

GET HAS LED TO EXTENSIVE AND WIDELY-REPORTED INFIGHTING IN GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS PROBABLY FURTHER DAMAGED ALP PROSPECTS. WHITLAM HAS SET TWO CONDITIONS FOR DOUBLE DISSOLUTION: CONTINUED SENATE REJECTION OF MAJOR GOVERNMENT BILLS AND REJECTION OF BUDGET BILLS. LIBERAL-COUNTRY OPPOSITION, FOR ITS PART, IS NOT PRESSING FOR ELECTIONS, AS WAS INDICATED BY OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN AT LIBERAL PARTY COUNCIL MEETING IN CANBERRA, OCT 12-14. (DETAILS OF MEETING BEING REPORTED BY AIRGRAM).

7. WHITLAM STATEMENT THAT LABOR HAS IMPROVED ITS PERCENTAGE OF VOTE IN 1967 IS NOT QUITE TRUE. LABOR PERCENTAGE OF POLL IN ELECTIONS OF MAY, 1974, WAS 49.3 PERCENT, COMPARED TO 49.5 PERCENT IN ELECTIONS OF DEC, 1972. THIS IS NOT RPT NOT A SMALL DETAIL, AS LABOR'S FAILURE TO GAIN CONTROL OF SENATE WAS A ND REMAINS SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLE TO ENACTMENT OF ITS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM.

8. MAJOR UNANSWERED QUESTION IS EFFECT CONTINUING INFLATION, RISING UNEMPLOYMENT, AND PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ADVERSE TO LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE ON BOTH GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION. NUMBER OF PROMINENT LABOR FIGURES ARE PREDICTING, BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, NEW GENERAL ELECTIONS IN MAY OR JUNE, 1975, EVIDENTLY ON ASSUMPTION THAT EVENTS WILL BE ADVERSE TO LABOR GOVERNMENT OVER NEXT EIGHT MONTHS OR SO.
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